

## 20<sup>th</sup> Annual OOCUR Conference

### Welcome Remarks

#### Official Opening Ceremony

Ansord Hewitt

OOCUR Chair

Director-General, Office of Utilities Regulation

2026 April 28

- Dr. The Hon. Andrew Wheatley, Minister with Responsibility for Science, Technology and Special Projects in the Office of The Prime Minister
- Hon. Rolston Anglin, Minister for Finance and Economic Development and Minister for Education and Training, Cayman Islands
- Bishop Conrad Pitkin, Custos of St. James
- Prof. Alvin Wint, Former Chairman of the OUR
- Dr. Marshe Atherly-Iketchi, Executive Director, OOCUR
- Fellow regional regulators
- Utility providers
- Ladies and gentlemen

Good morning.

As the current Chairman of OOCUR, I take great pride in welcoming you to the 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference being held here in Jamaica for the first time in ten years.

Every time OOCUR comes to Jamaica, it is a reminder that it all started in this country – just up the road from here – for those familiar with giving directions in Jamaica. In actual fact, scores of miles or kilometres in an equally scenic location - Laughing Waters in the neighbouring parish of St. Ann. It was there that our visionary and unrepentant regionalists, yet cosmopolitan forbearers, gave birth to this vital regional organisation. This was where an agreement was signed by regional utility regulators on July 26, 2002, which gave rise to the establishment of OOCUR.

Among the objectives envisaged for it then were:

- Enhance the understanding of issues related to utility regulation;
- Facilitate the sharing of information and experience among Members;
- Facilitate the sharing and exchange of expertise on regulatory issues;
- Provide advice on the establishment and enhancement of effective utility regulation; and
- Host an annual conference and such other conferences as necessary.

I dare say those are as relevant today as they were then – only with added urgency!

Indeed, I reflect on the First OOCUR Conference held on 16-19 September 16-19, 2003, in Trinidad and Tobago under the theme, "The Challenge to Utility Regulators in the Caribbean". This could easily have transposed to be the focus of this year's conference, 23 years later.

It is fair to say that our commitment to and execution of the ideal of OOCUR has waxed and waned over these two and a half decades, but the logic and imperative of the organisation's existence is evident in its endurance and persistence.

It has been a distinct pleasure, privilege, and honour to occupy the place of Chair over the last two years. And I am happy to report that after a hiatus leading into and out of the Covid-19 pandemic, OOCUR has come roaring back.

Indeed, back in November 2024, our colleagues in Suriname, at the time the newest addition to the membership, hosted the first face-to-face annual conference since 2019 in Paramaribo. At that conference and the

General Assembly following it, we recommitted to the ideals of OOCUR and approved a five-year strategic plan that was already in place.

I believe it is fair to say, and I hope you will agree with me, that you have seen a marked resurgence in the presence, activities and impact of OOCUR, as our Executive Director, Dr. Marsha Atherly Ikechi, with a bit of additional secretariat help, has, among other things:

- Re-engaged more intensely with our regional partners;
- Improved and expanded communication with and to members;
- Delivered a suite of member benefits in the form of webinars, training activities, provision of information and making vital connections;
- Raised the profile of OOCUR regionally and internationally.

I offer my commendations to her and the team.

At the conference in Suriname, I exhorted that we should not rest until we make this event the flagship forum for regional utility regulators in terms of:

- Attracting a global audience of regulators, utility providers, academics, researchers, investors, and multilateral partners,

- Providing thought leadership and case studies on cutting-edge regulatory problems, innovations, and achievements;
- Showcasing regional talents; and
- Forging vital regional and international links

I believe the subscription to the conference this year, in terms of numbers and diversity of nationalities, interests, and skill sets, and the rich and eclectic mix of agenda matters, is evidence that we are well on the way to achieving that objective.

This year's theme - Navigating Caribbean Regulatory Challenges: Opportunities, Innovations and Collaborations – provides us with an occasion not just to bemoan the complexities of these challenges but to showcase how we have identified opportunities among them and have been applying our creative genius to navigate them and move our societies forward. It also accepts that even though many of us are islanders, the imperative to collaborate, share resources, leverage synergies, and move forward together is not lost on us. Indeed, as a colleague of mine would say, no regulator is an island!

Looking at the agenda – I am agog at the range of issues we propose to deliberate on, and I am sure that each participant will say there is not

enough time. I think, however, we will judge this conference a success if it helps us to:

- Engage in honest, frank and respectful dialogue;
- Confront our inactions and procrastinations
- Create a greater sense of urgency to resolve the pressing issue facing us;
- Bring greater awareness that help is available; and
- leave with clear means, plans and timeline to address some of our pressing developmental gaps

I have high expectations for this conference and every confidence that they will be met.

That said, I am aware that I have seized upon the privilege of Chairman and host to be a little expansive or, as someone less charitable would say, to go from hither to thither *and yon*. But I must remember that my assignment was to say welcome. So again, I say welcome to this Conference and welcome to Jamaica. By all means, be stimulated by the rich regulatory content, but do not forget that there are also other wonderful stimulants on this wonderful island paradise of ours. Of course, as regulators, make sure you keep it legal!

May the next few days meet and exceed your expectations.

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